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**Evan T. Jones (ed.), ‘The suit to obtain the position of customer of Bridgwater for William Benger, 1596’ (University of Bristol, ROSE, 2011)<sup>1</sup>**

The following documents concern the suit made to the Lord Treasurer, Cecil Burghley, to obtain the position of customer of Bridgwater for William Benger, who had formerly been a clerk to the customer of Bristol, Thomas Taylor.<sup>2</sup> The suit entailed: a formal petition from Benger; a letter from the existing customer, William Spencer, noting his willingness to resign the post to Benger; and a letter of commendation written by six of Bristol’s aldermen. Benger’s suit was successful and he was duly appointed to the post.<sup>3</sup>

*Letter: Mayor and aldermen of Bristol to Cecil Burghley, Lord Treasurer, 18 March 1596<sup>4</sup>*

To the Righte honorable our  
very good Lorde the Lorde  
highe Treasurer of England

[Docketed]<sup>5</sup>  
18 Martij 1595<sup>6</sup>

Maiour<sup>7</sup> and Aldermen<sup>8</sup> of Bristoll  
~~Bridgwater~~<sup>9</sup>

Recommend the sute of  
William Benger for the Customer  
ship of that Port uppon the  
surrender of William Spencer  
that he is a very fitt and  
sufficient man to oxicute<sup>10</sup>  
the place ./

Righte honorable our humble dewties unto your good Lordship Remembred, Whereas the bearer hereof (William Benger) ys determined to become a humble suyter unto your Lordship for the Customershippe of Bridgwater (which Roome)<sup>11</sup> William Spencer nowe Customer there ys verye willinge (yf yt may stande with your Lordships good lykinge) to Resigne unto him, we thoughte good, in the behalfe of the said William Benger, whose Credytt and behavyour we have Longe knowne

<sup>1</sup> The following conventions were employed when transcribing these documents: the line spacing, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, deletions and underlining follow the manuscript; reconstructions of suspensions are in italics, editorial comments are in squared brackets. I would like to thank Margaret Condon (University of Bristol) for her advice on the transcription and James Ross (TNA) for providing photographs of the documents.

<sup>2</sup> J. Vanes (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century* (Bristol Record Society publications, Vol. XXXI, 1979), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> The National Archives: Public Record Office [TNA:PRO], E190/1083/23.

<sup>4</sup> TNA:PRO, SP12 256/98 fo. 199.

<sup>5</sup> The address and docket of both this letter and Spencer’s letter are on the verso. The dockets would have been added by one of Cecil’s secretaries.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Martij’: March. The year is 1596 by modern reckoning.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Maiour’: mayor.

<sup>8</sup> The aldermen formed the ‘inner cabinet’ of the town council. Bristol had twelve aldermen at this time, so the letter demonstrates that Benger had secured the support of at least half of them.

<sup>9</sup> It appears the secretary had first written ‘Maiour and Aldermen of Bridgwater’, with Bridgwater on the following line. Another hand then struck-out ‘Bridgwater’ and added ‘Bristoll’ above.

<sup>10</sup> ‘oxicute’: execute.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Roome’: room – i.e. an office or post.

amongeste us) to signifie unto *your good Lordship* that he ys a man  
 very hable and suffycyente for the perfourmance of such a charge  
 humbly beseeching *your good Lordship* to Respecte<sup>12</sup> him accordingle.  
 And soe *with our hartie prayers for your Lordships* longe health, in all  
 humblenes, we ende: At Bristoll this xvij<sup>th</sup> of marche  
1595

Your honors humble  
 at comaundmente.

[signed]

Wyllyam Parphey mayor<sup>13</sup>

George Snygge<sup>14</sup>

Thomas aldworth alderman<sup>15</sup>

Richard Cole Aldarman<sup>16</sup>

Mycuell Pepwall Alderman<sup>17</sup>

Fraunces Knight Alderman<sup>18</sup>

John Webbe Alderman<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 'Respecte': respect – i.e. consider / regard.

<sup>13</sup> William Parphey / Parfey (d. 1607) was mayor of Bristol in 1495/6: L. Toumlin Smith (ed.), *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar by Robert Ricart* (Camden Society, V, 1872) [hereafter *Ricart's Kalendar*], p. 63. In 1573 he was listed as a 'merchant' in the apprentice registers: M. McGregor, *Bristol Apprentice Book*, Vol. 1, 1566-1573 (Bristol, 1992), p. 32. After that he is listed as a 'vintner': M. McGregor, *Bristol Apprentice Book*, Vol. 2, 1573-1579 (Bristol, 1992), pp. 7, 20, 26; M. McGregor, *Bristol Apprentice Book*, Vol. 3, 1579-1586 (Bristol, 1992), pp. 1, 9; M. McGregor, *Bristol Apprentice Book*, Vol. 4, 1586-1593 (Bristol, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> George Snygge / Snigg M.P., was Bristol's 'Recorder' at this time; either he or his father (George Snygge, d. 1582) was mayor in 1574/5: *Ricart's Kalendar*, pp. 59, 63. Both were members of the Merchant Venturers in the 1560s: P. V. McGrath, *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol* (Bristol, 1975), pp. 18 n. 23, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aldworth (d. 1599) was mayor in 1582/3 and 1592/3. He was lauded in 1585/6 and 1593/4 for providing famine relief to the region at his own expense: *Ricart's Kalendar*, pp. 61-2, TNA:PRO, SP12/245/9(i), fo. 18. He was also a member of the Merchant Venturers of Bristol: McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 17 n. 22, 18 n. 23, 19 n.27.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Cole had been an M.P. for Bristol in 1584 and was mayor in 1585/6: *Ricart's Kalendar*, p. 61. He is listed as a merchant in the 1594/5 port book: S. Flavin and E. T. Jones (eds.), 'Bristol Port Book, Overseas, 1594/5' (University of Bristol, ROSE, 2009) <<http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1307>> accessed 10 Jan 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Pepwell was mayor in 1593/4: *Ricart's Kalendar*, p. 62. He is listed as a merchant of the city in the 1575/6 and 1595/6 port books: S. Flavin and E. T. Jones (eds.), 'Bristol Port Book, Overseas Inwards, 1575/6' (University of Bristol, ROSE, 2009) <<http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1305>> accessed 10 Jan 2011; Flavin and Jones, 'Bristol Port Book, Overseas, 1594/5'.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Knight (d. 1617) was mayor in 1594/5: M. Stanford, *The Ordinances of Bristol, 1506-1598* (Bristol Record Society Publications, Vol. XLI, 1990), p. 97. He is listed as a merchant in the 1600/1 port book and in documents relating to Bristol's trade in 1605: S. Flavin and E. T. Jones (eds.), 'Bristol Port Book, Overseas, 1600/1' (University of Bristol, ROSE, 2009) <<http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1308>> accessed 10 Jan 2011; Vanes, *Documents Illustrating*, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> John Webbe was mayor in 1597/8: Stanford, *Ordinances of Bristol*, p. 102. He is listed as a merchant of the city in the 1575/6 and 1594/5 port books: Flavin and Jones, 'Bristol Port Book, Overseas Inwards, 1575/6'; 'Bristol Port Book, Overseas, 1594/5'. He is also recorded as a merchant in a document of 1605: Vanes, *Documents Illustrating*, p. 114.

*Letter: William Spencer, customer of Bridgwater to Cecil Burghley, Lord Treasurer, 6 May 1596*<sup>20</sup>

To the Right honourable and my  
vearie good Lorde Sir William  
Cecill knight Lord highe  
Treasorer of Englonde  
geve theise ~ ~

[Docketed]  
12 Maij<sup>21</sup> 1596

William Spencer Customer of  
Bridgwater

His consent that William Benger  
may have his place, if it  
so please your lordship.

Right honorable my humble duetie remembred. Whearas  
about v<sup>o</sup> yeres past, it pleased your honour to bestowe uppon me  
the Customership of Bridgwater ~~uppon me~~ So it is ~  
that in respect of the smale trade there, and not so  
much as will paye the Fees allowed by your honour. I am  
contented (if it may stande with your Lordships good likinge) to  
resigne the same to William Benger your Lordships petitioner who  
is a sufficient man for the dischardge of that place  
as appeareth by a lettre directed to your Lordship from the  
maior & his bretheren of the cittie of Bristoll. And  
so prayinge for your Lordships longe health & prosperitie  
I humbly take my leave. Clementes Inne<sup>22</sup> this vj<sup>th</sup>  
of may 1596.

Your Lordships most humbly to be commanded

/ /

[signed] William Spencer

<sup>20</sup> TNA:PRO, SP12/257/72 fo. 114.

<sup>21</sup> 'Maij': May.

<sup>22</sup> 'Clementes Inne': Clement's Inn, London.

*Petition of William Benger to Cecil Burghley, Lord Treasurer*<sup>23</sup>

The humble petition of  
William Benger :

That William Spencer nowe Customer  
of Bridgwater is willinge  
to resigne the office of Customership  
unto *your* Orator.

That *your* Orator hath brought  
*lettres* Comendatory from the maior  
Aldermen and others of the cittie  
of Bristoll.

Humbly prayinge *your* Lordship (if it  
may stande *with your Lordships* good liking)  
to graunte *your* warrant for the  
renewinge of the Pattent in his  
name.

That the Customer is nowe in Towne  
& redie to assigne over the same

[*Docket*]

The Accompte of the nowe  
Customer would be seene  
whether he be in debt to  
the Quene or no/<sup>24</sup>

[*signed*] W Burghley

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<sup>23</sup> TNA:PRO, SP12/257/73, fo. 115.

<sup>24</sup> To this petition is attached an account by 'William Neale Auditore', annotated by Lord Burghley and Thomas Fanshawe (the Queen's Remembrancer). The account seeks to answer Burghley's request by determining whether or not Spencer owed money to the Queen. The account was found to be in surplusage, meaning that the Crown owed money to Spencer. The account was then forwarded by Burghley to Fanshawe to establish whether the money collected in the port was sufficient to pay the customer's fees and, if not, whether it was worth giving the customer so great an allowance. Fanshawe's response was that the 'auncient allowaunce' of £33 6s. 8d. was 'little ynough' and that it was important to maintain a customer at Bridgwater because 'otherwise merchautes will resorte thither to be freed from paying of their dueties': TNA:PRO, SP12/257/73(i) fo. 116.